

Afghans and Social Unrest in Kashmir Society 1753-1819.A.D.

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Abstract: Afghans were invited by the people of valley to relieve themselves from the screws of oppression which they faced during the early period. Instead of getting remedy to their problems the invitation increased their miseries. Each and every sect got affected with their arrival. They increased burden on the economy of Kashmir valley and were in a constant try to drain the rich resources of valley towards their own country. To fulfill their illegal desires number of newer taxes were introduced. The non Muslim population of valley remained the worst hit of problems. Even numbers of them migrated to other parts to save their life without caring for property. Some areas remained without the inhabitants and looked like a desert. Arts and crafts for which Kashmir valley has been famous throughout the world were destroyed by them. Number of artisans changed their profession in order to save their life.

Keywords: Social disorder, Drain, Artisans, Newer taxes, Jazia.

INTRODUCTION

The people of Kashmir could no longer tolerate the misrule of Mughal satraps, and accordingly when Ahmad Shah Abdali of Kabul was at Lahore in, 1752.A.D, two Kashmiri noblemen Mir Muquim Kant and Khawja Zahir Didmari, waited upon him at Lahore, and disgracefully requested him to bring Kashmir under his control. Ahmad Shah, a free hooter of Nadir Shah gladly accepted this offer and immediately dispatched a powerful Afghan army under the command of Abdullah Khan Aihak Aqasi, to occupy the valley. The Mughal satrap offered a strong resistance, but were defeated and the Afghan Governor planted the Afghan flag on the ramparts of Akbar's town at Nagar Nagar in Srinagar. The rule of Mughals in Kashmir came to an end although it continued to exist in northern India. Kashmir remained a dependency of Kabul rulers roughly for a period of 67 years. In 1753, A. D, Kashmir got conquered by Ahmad Shah Abdali, whose descendents ruled over Kashmir till its occupation by Sikhs in 1819, A. D. Like Mughals the Afghans also sent their governors and deputy governors to rule over Kashmir. During the period Kashmir was ruled by twenty-eight governors and deputy governors. The Afghans ruled over Kashmir for a very short period of time. The Afghans were invited by the Kashmiris to take over the administration of Kashmir. They hoped that after the fall of central Mughal power, the Afghans would provide them suitable and better administration, but it proved to be a distant dream. Instead of getting relief the Kashmiris were ruthlessly plundered by the Afghans. The period is marked by rack renting, drain of wealth, and oppressive taxation on trade, crafts and withdrawal of patronage to the local arts. These arts and crafts were introduced among the people of valley long before especially after the establishment of Muslim rule in, 1339.A.D. by Sultan Shamsu'd-din Shah Mir.

The people of Kashmir were known for their art skills from times immemorial. The centre of skills was the city of Srinagar. But other areas such as Anantnag, Sopore, Badipore and Pulwama also did not remain behind. During the winters people besides other engagements were forced to engage themselves in some

industrial skill in order to augment their day today needs. The chief industries included the manufacture of Shawls, Silk, Woolen Cloth etc. Besides these some other industrial works were also carried by the people. Among the existing industries Shawl work is as old as the hills of valley. It was a very prosperous industry and acted as supporting structure of people in economic field during the Sultanate period. During the medieval period the contacts of Kashmir with Central Asia were revived by Muslim rulers that attracted the artisans towards the valley. The mention may be made of Mir Syed Ali Handani who arrived in valley during the rule of Sultan Qutub'd-din, 1373-89.A.D, along with large number of followers. Some of them were the trained and skilled workers of different arts. Not only Shawl skill was introduced but also different skills of the same nature at different places. The industry was patronized, nourished and stimulated by the Sultans. Through their encouraging efforts Shawl industry received great impetus with the positive support of foreign artisans. Large number of arts and crafts for which Kashmir has been famous throughout the world, were introduced from Persia for the first time during the time of Sultans, particularly during the golden era of Sultan Zainul Abidin. Some of the arts and crafts which were then unknown in most parts of Central Asia were existing in Kashmir during his time. In Kashmir one meets with all these arts and crafts which are in most cities uncommon, such as stone polishing. No doubt some arts and crafts were existing during the Hindu rule, but these had decayed with the downfall of Hindu rule. The invasion of Dalucha in, 1320.A.D, has resulted in the death of large number of artists and craftsmen. Death and fear proved devastating in the field of art. Sultan Sikander, 1389-1413.A.D, and Sultan Ali Shah, 1413-20.A.D, destroyed what ever was left. Sultan Zainul Abidin, 1420-70.A.D, revived and reorganized all these arts and crafts which were destroyed during the course of time. For the promotion of arts and crafts he used novel methods. He provided every sort of patronage to the foreign artists and craftsmen, due to which a large number of artists and craftsmen thronged into the valley. Every sort of arrangement was made for them and they were also motivated to settle down permanently in the valley along with their families. If any artist wished to leave after a short stay, he was supposed to train the local men in his art, and after that he was allowed to leave the valley. The Sultan invited competent teachers from various countries to Kashmir, so that they could train people here. If any local was willing to go outside to receive training in the various designs and styles of art, he was provided every sort of help, and also it was also the duty of king to look after his family. Because of the liberal approach and facilities, Sultan turned Kashmir into an industrial garden. As a result there was tremendous economic development in the valley. Above all significant progress was made in the fields such as, Glass making, Silk, Shawl and Carpet weaving, Paper making, Wood carving, Paper making and Book binding. Before the introduction of these arts and crafts Kashmir was poor in industrial sector, so much so that even loom was not indigenously found in the valley. During his time Kashmiri Shawl began to be exported to other parts of world. After his death social problems faced by the people resulted in the decline of arts. But the trade was revived by Central Asian ruler Mirza Haider Dughlat who occupied valley in, 1540-51.A.D. During his short tenure there were Shia Sunni tensions in society, but still he managed to boost the Shawl art and invited some trained masters like, Nazuq Beigh a resident of Khokhand to valley of Kashmir. Nazuq Beigh is being credited that some newer designs in Shawl work were introduced as the Texture of Shawl, a new element of red and green spots in regular rows. The same was unknown before his arrival. Because of new designs the Shawls of Kashmir earned good market outside valley. Several types of Shawls of finished nature were then manufactured by Kashmiri Shawl workers and Jamawar being the best among the manufactured Shawls. There seems to have more excellency in the art with the coming of Mughals in, 1586.A.D.

From the very beginning of Akbar's rule, Kashmiri Shawl became the coveted article of Mughal luxury and accordingly became the valuable item of royal harem. Akbar used to call the finest Shawl by the name of Parm-Narm. The art of Shawl weaving attained such an excellence that a Shawl of one and a half square

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yards could be twisted and passed through an ordinary finger ring. It is still available in the market known by the name of "Ring Shawl" of Kashmir. As narrated by Abul Fazl the department of Shawl industry was improved by Akbar because he was fond of the Shawls and became the fashion of day. As quoted by Mohibul Hassan there were "two thousand factories manufacturing Shawl" during the rule of Akbar. Later Mughal rulers provided some sort of subsidy on Shawl weaving. As quoted by Bernier the "Shawl industry will very soon change the economic status of people in the valley of Kashmir". The increasing demand also resulted in change of prices ranged between two hundred to twelve hundred as a sign of mastery over the art.

With the occupation of Kashmir by the Afghans in, 1753-1819.A.D, the Shawls of Kashmir were already having the great demand outside the valley. The said art was improved by them. At the height of Afghan rule some newer designs were got incorporated in the existing designs as the new flowered work which also raised its price. Immediately after realizing the revenue of valley they started the policy of oppressing people including skilled workers and others as well. During the rule of Afghans Kashmiris became victims at the hands of harsh tempered Pathans. They appointed their countrymen who rung so much money as they could out of the wretched people of Kashmir. The appointed authorities collected money as quickly as they could, because they were unaware when they would be called back to appoint the new favorite one.

Raja Suhk Jewan Mal, 1754-1762.A.D, who ruled for a very short period of time was more popular among Kashmiris than other Pathan rulers. No doubt his period was short, but there was tremendous progress in Kashmir and he invited Brahmans from other parts and settled them in the valley, hoping to strengthen his position. Instead of helping him the Brahmans engaged themselves in looting and plundering the people. His career ended in 1762, when Ahmad Shah Abdali sent Nuru'd-din Bamzai to overthrow his rule. He was captured and carried to Lahore where Ahmad Shah Abdali got him murdered under the feet of an elephant. After a short stay Nuru'd-din returned to Kabul leaving the administration in the hands of Bulund Khan Bamzai. But Nuru'd-din was again deputed to rule over Kashmir in, 1764. A. D. He appointed two Kashmiri nobles one as revenue collector and other as diwan. For sometime they worked in a cordial atmosphere, but their relation got strained on the issue of collection of revenue, and this led to the murder of Mir Muqim, and the suspected behind this episode was Kailash Dhar. Before leaving Nuru'd-din appointed his nephew Jan Mohammad Khan to carry on the administration, but he too proved to be a notorious ruler. Another ruler Faqirullah Khan who ruled over Kashmir converted a large number of Hindus forcibly to Islam. Some relief to Kashmiris was provided by Amir Khan Sher Jawan, 1772-1776.A.D, who was the best among all Pathan rulers who ruled over Kashmir at least he built the bridge of Amira Kadal and also constructed the palace of Sher Garhi in Srinagar.

Almost all the Pathan rulers inflicted cruelties and adopted all sorts of harsh measures to loot and plunder the Kashmir of its wealth and the wealth was drained to Kabul. Hajji Karim din Khan, 1776-83. A. D, he levied numerous and illegal taxes on Kashmiris. His thirst for blood and money induced him to commit the basest people. Without the consideration of caste and creed continued the policy of oppression on the Kashmiris and levied some new taxes on Kashmiris. The rich jagirdars and nobles had to pay Nazrana (Zari-i-Niyaz), which amounted to four and even six times of their total income. Zari-i-Ashkhas another tax from merchants and bankers and Zari-i-Hubab a tax on grain from the farmers was realized. All these cruel and harsh measures were inflicted on Kashmiri people through his dishonest tax collector Aslam Harkara. Hajji Karim dad Khan even excelled his predecessors. Most part of the revenue was drained away to Kabul and a very little was spent on the local developments. Being the innovator of new tax called as traki (one trak per kharwar as an additional tax on peasantry) and for the first time introduced the system of Dag Shawl

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(Department of Shawls) in order to realize maximum from the starving Shawl weavers. Really their life had become miserable because what they earned was forcibly snatched from them. With the result they lost interest in the Shawl work. Even numbers of them migrated to other areas in order to save their life not property. Such were his oppressions on the workers that an amount of thirteen lakh was realized from Shawl industry within a year. The real workers received only two to four paisa as their daily wages. The rest was taken by the caretakers. Under such conditions the world reputed Shawl industry faced shortage of skilled workers. The main reason for this was the Shawl weavers were deceived through the department of Dag Shawl. The important thing to note was that the Kashmiri Shawls were having great demand in other countries like, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkistan, Europe and Russia. Kani and Amalika Shawls of Kashmir were having the great reputation in the market. The design of Amali Shawl is worked in almost imperceptible stitches covering the whole ground in an elaborate pattern and style. The Amali Shawl can be completed in a year's time. The later was introduced in the valley by a traveler named as Sai'd Baba popularly known as Ala Baba during the time of Azad Khan, 1783-85.A.D, ruling Governor of Kashmir valley.

Azad Khan is remembered only for brutality and cruelty. He improved nothing but cut off heads of innocent Kashmiris. The immediate victims were the pandits, Shias and Bombas. He adopted the practice to tie up the pandits two and two in the grass sacks and sink them in the Dal Lake. Certain types of other social restrictions were also imposed on the Hindus. The forehead mark was banned, Jazia was reimposed. With the imposition of Jazia many of the Brahmans either fled away or were killed and many were converted to Islam. All these inhuman actions were done to create the atmosphere of fear among them and was the first in rank to inflict the hardships on Kashmiris. He was succeeded by Saifud'd-din Madad Khan, 1785-1786.A.D, and there is well proverb "Zulm-i-Asad ra rasid Madad", which means that Madad out Heroded Asad. Next in rank was the Mir Hazar, 1793-1794.A.D, who used leather bags instead of grass sacks for the drowning of Brahmans. Whatever was earned through different activities was taken away by them. Under such difficult conditions the workers of various arts were surrounded by problems. But still they managed to manufacture the best quality of Kashmiri Shawls as an identity of hereditary craft.

In 1796.A.D, Syed Yahya from Baghdad visited Kashmir during the regime of Abdullah Khan Alkozai, 1796-1805.A.D, After paying his visit to various religious places of valley he decided to leave. But before his return Abdullah Khan Alkozai presented him the Kashmiri Shawl. The presented Shawl finally reached to Napoleon. From that very day the demand for Kashmiri Shawls at international level increased and France emerged as the biggest exporter of Kashmiri Shawls. France took eighty percent of the exported share alone. Within a calculated period of time these beautiful Shawl wraps became fashionable item for the Western people.

Atta Mohammad Khan, 1807-1813.A.D, created social disorder in society. His main targets were both Shais as well as Brahmans. An old woman named Koshib acted as his agent was the terror for Brahmans. She used to destroy the beauty of Brahman girls by shaving their heads. During the time Musalman used to ride on the back of a Pandit and the famous quotation "you are a Brahman I will mount on you" "Buta chuk to khosa dita" is still quoted in Kashmiri language. As quoted by Moorcroft the whole value of Shawl goods manufactured during the Afghan rule in Kashmir was about thirty five lakhs of rupees per annum. During the Sikh time it declined equal to half of amount mentioned above. The last Afghan governor was the Jabar Khan to rule over Kashmir in, 1819.A.D. He ruled Kashmir only for four months and was defeated by Maharaja Rangit Singh in, 1819.A.D. The Kashmiris were already tired of baneful impact of Afghan rule, that led to their downfall and occupation of valley by Sikhs.

CONCLUSION

The period really proved harmful for all sections of society. Revival of contacts and trade links with Central Asia resulted in chaos and confusion. With the result there was complete social unrest in Kashmir valley, that finally involved people in economic problems.

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